

Child of War

To the memory of my brother
Raymond Taylor (1924 - 1944),
Royal Navy

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to Danny Ledesma and Lucy Evans
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by Danny Ledesma

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Child of War

By

Sylvia Jennifer Taylor

I was born in Egypt. The third child of Henry and Doris Taylor. My name Sylvia a contradiction, as I had golden red corkscrew curls and blue eyes. Which my mother said fascinated the Egyptians, she would lose me only to find they had taken me to show me off again

My mother was intelligent, good looking; she took great pride in herself. I loved to hear her play the piano. As a young girl she designed hats, her parents were Albert and Charlotte Gwatkin.

In 1923 on my mother's 18th birthday, January 28th, she was taken to the pictures by Henry Taylor. Some time later she was working as a doctors assistant, putting pills and medicines in the containers, she could not understand what was happening to her body. No young girl was told the "secrets" of birth in those days. She returned to her parents home and the truth had to be kept from her brothers. As fate would have it, on October 27 1923. A beautiful baby girl Betty was born. Nine months to the day.

Doris Gwatkin and Henry Taylor were married. Fourteen months after Betty a baby boy Raymond was born; about midnight Christmas Eve 1924. It was to be six years before I was born. Mother and father lived in army quarters in Egypt. Betty and Raymond going to school there. It was then I was born in hospital in Abbassia on the regimental day of the Royal Tank Regiment, which was my fathers regiment. A bib was put on me of the regiment, the motto: "Fear Nought". I

believe this motto stayed with me all my life.

At the age of three months I was taken home to England.



While passing the Rock of Gibraltar my mother held me up to her brother whose ship was in dock. Fifty years later I visited the Rock myself. I was taken to the home of my grandparents, who had recently moved into a new bungalow, and slept in my grandmother's laundry basket.



I remembr my

grandparents Albert and Charlotte Gwatkin with tears in my eyes. I loved them very much, not once did I see a cross face or hear a cross word, I only knew love and kindness. They lived in the Marine Parade, Sheerness, Kent. My Grandmother was short and slight - as a young girl she was called Coppernob because of her red hair. I remember her with rich brown hair long down her back, which she rolled into a fashionable roll during the day. As a girl she lived in Staines, Middlesex. My grandfather was seventeen years older than her. She would tell me she had everything down to a scrubbing brush before they married. My Grandfather was a very smart man, a quiet man with a twinkle in his eye, and a mischievous giggle as if he was trying to smother it. He was happy with his pipe and his garden as long as there were no cats in it. They had two sons and my Mother. My gGrandfather went to China, he was a mariner, must have taken many months in those days. Perhaps that is why he did not return for seven years, when the youngest son was born. At one time Grandfather was Chief Coaling officer of the Nore, when they shipped the coal. The Nore is a stretch of water at the Thames estuary. My mother as a girl used to go on his boat, she would feel her father had a soft spot for her, perhaps as she was the only girl. He would ask her to get his slippers for him, in one she would find a penny, this was before the twenties, so she was being favoured. There was a time when my Grandfather was Lock Master at Maidenhead. My mother's eldest brother was a Chief Shipwright in the Royal Navy, the younger two; Captain Merchant Navy and Royal Marine Bandmaster. They all attended Grammar school and learnt music. My mother played the piano beautifully. I do not remember my Grandparents Henry and Mary Taylor. They lived in the same Marine Parade as my Mother's parents. They had originally come from Plymouth. Grandfather was a Naval Lieutenant. I have visited their grave in Minster, Isle of Sheppy. They had two sons and three daughters.

My Mother, Father, Betty, Raymond and myself lived in Rose Street, Sheerness, in the early thirties. There was a small back yard and through the gate was an alleyway, of which there were many in Sheerness. Children were free to come and go in those days, out to play. We would follow behind the Salvation

Army band, a regular sight on Sundays.

Following behind the steam roller what fun, when they were tarring the roads! When the black sticky tar bubbles popped up, it was good to pop them. Most children attended afternoon Sunday school. You received a religious picture to stick in your Sunday School Book, an incentive to attend, so you did not miss going else you would not have your card full. I usually had my way asking for a penny to put in the Nestles chocolate machine, on the sea front. You unwrapped the red paper, silver paper underneath and you had a thin small bar of chocolate. I was not a healthy child like my sister and brother, so I was given in to. There were slopes on the beach, by the Catholic Church which we covered with sand to make them slippery and we went sliding up and down wearing out our knickers. In our house I remember the gas man calling, to collect the big bronze pennies from the meter. You waited eagerly to see how many he would give you back in dividend. Every penny counted in the thirties. I can still imagine the line of white shoes and plimsolls in the back yard to dry, as you used a white block which you wet with water, then put on the shoes with a cloth. Mother used to push me in the push chair to her parents home. Nanny, as we still call my Grandmother when we speak of her, was the only one who could get me to take my medicine. I know I had Cod-liver oil and Malt, which tasted of toffee and was lovely. Nanny used to say "don't put your feet on the rungs of the chair Sylvie ". She did have a comfortable home, I always loved going there. When we were going home and it was dark I used to ask "mummy, why does the moon keep following us?"



All this was to end when I was four years old. Mother and Father parted, no doubt frowned upon in those days. Nanny always told us our father was a Gentleman. My mother never said a wrong word about him. My Mother no doubt found things hard, she always had the very best and was cosseted as a child. Through ignorance in those days she was pregnant at eighteen. Now she was twenty nine with three children; eleven, nine and four years old. Married to the army, shipped from barrack to Egypt with two children, coming back with three. Mother would tell us when we were older what a hard life this was. Traipsing across muddy fields to army quarters, wherever the army had sent you, carrying children. Rose street was not exactly the life she had been brought up to, living on army pay. I loved my mother very much, but do not remember my father in those days.



Betty was eleven and sent away to be educated at The Royal Victoria Patriotic School, Wandsworth Common London SW18. The school was for the orphan daughters of servicemen Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone in 1857. All the soldiers in the Crimean war gave one shilling from their pay. Raymond, nine years old went to the brother school the Duke of York School, in Dover, Kent, where he wore army uniform. I was never to see or hear from him again till he was seventeen years old.



I was not to see or hear anything of my father till I was twenty nine years old. when he showed me a chalked drawing I had done when I was tiny and he had kept safe. I had spelt my name wrongly on it "Silovia Taylor". He told me he saw me once in the picture queue at Sheerness, he knew me by my red hair. I must have home on holiday from school.

My Mother worked as a housekeeper, cook and lived in taking me with her. One place was Sevenoaks in Kent. There was a large kitchen, with high window sills, I would sit up there and watch her and once was stung by a wasp. Mother would tell me to run away and play shops. I was a small thin child, with red hair and blue eyes, people would say I was pretty, but I was always coughing.

They kept large dogs at the house, luckily outside, as I was scared of them. There was a five bar gate. I went through and walked down the lane with an older boy called Leonard to school. It was a small Village school. There was a weird sweet shop, but we still dared to go into.

I went to the pictures with my mother. The one big entertainment in those days. I used to take off the film stars - I loved to hear the tap dancing, and try to copy. Shirley Temple was the child star. I sang all her songs. I decided there and then I would go on the stage when I was older. The nearest I came when I was five I played the part on stage dressed as Little Bo Peep, dressed as her and wore a lace round flat hat, and carried a crook. Nanny and mother came to see me. Yes I won first prize. A big Mickey Mouse book. I do not think I liked the book. I was quite grown up for my age, I thought it was a silly book. Now if I had it today it would be worth a penny or two.

When I was six we lived in Tonbridge Wells, Kent. My Mother worked in a small hotel. Further down the drive was an annex where we both slept. I would be put to bed there, other people would be in the annex. When it was dark I would creep down the stairs, open the front door quietly. Then walk along the drive wearing only my night-dress nothing on my feet. To the Hotel where my mother would be setting the tables for breakfast. Filling the marmalade pots, and making butter balls, which I would enjoy watching her make. She used two wooden small bats and rolled the butter in them, quite an art, thin lines would be patterned on the butter balls. They were called Butter Pats. I would ask her crossly when she was coming to Bed. Did this more than once. Nanny came to see us, we sat on the common and Nanny had her handbag stolen.

It happened in those days too.



August 1937 Betty came to stay at the annex with us, home for school holiday. She was thirteen years old, and a very pretty girl. I have said Children were seen and not heard in those days. I knew something was going on. It was my turn to go to the RVP school.

I was dressed in a very smart new royal blue coat and beret.(I never wore them again). I went on a train with nanny and mother. Going through those enormous front doors, I knew I was to be left there. The place was terrifying. I was screaming my only weapon, The staff came out of the different rooms to

see what all the noise was about. I was told if I stopped crying I could have my uniform fitted straight away.



I was to remain at the school for ten years. A shocking thing to happen to a six year old, it must have been very upsetting for my Mother too. Years later she told me every body was telling her it was the best thing for me. The school wanted me to come there too. I don't doubt they did already knowing Betty, a lovely girl. As life turned out it was the best for me, but I am not expected to understand this at the age of six, and loving my mother and nanny very much.

I soon toed the line like all the girls did, and some were only four. I was never to see Betty as she was seven years older than me and with the senior girls, in Raglan House. I would be in Nightingale house. The next House, Roberts was for the juniors, then you went on to a senior house. Raglan, Jelico, or Haig. All names of war leaders. The school was run on Victorian, and regimental ways. Character training being their first conquest. That motto Fear Naught ! was coming into play in my life.

It was a different world I had come to. You must understand it was a different world in the thirties. Don't get me wrong I have never regretted going to the Pat school. As it was loving or unlovingly called. Infact I am proud of my upbringing. I

know it made me a stronger person in character, I was given the world to see in a different light. Instead of playing in the alleyways of Sheerness. I must add I did come from a very good family.

This is what I can tell you about, The Royal Victoria Patriotic School. How I lived those years 1937 - 1946. The building was magnificent with St. George and the Dragon carved at the top in the middle. Across the meadow was the railway line. We would go there and wave the Union Jack if the Royal Family were going by in the Royal train. In the Spring the Horse Chestnut trees would be in blossom in pink and white. We had our own Chapel and Sickbay in the grounds, and outdoor swimming pool.

My dormitory had all the Nightingale girls in one room. Black iron bedsteads head to toe, about twenty four of us, down both sides of the room. Miss Bury the house mistress had her room in a cubicle at the end. Down the length of the centre of the dormitory were the lockers, low - two or three feet high. This is where our clothes were kept, they were wide enough for us to sit on. This is what we did while waiting for our turn to bath every night, with our towel over our arm. Probably in silence, so much was done in silence, in line, marching and everything done in age-line. It was six o'clock bedtime kneeling by our beds we sang vespers:

"Father dismiss us with thy benediction,
send us in joy to our beds tonight,
God as we praise thee through the hours of darkness,
keep us till morning light."

Or:

"Hands together softly so little eyes shut tight father just
before we go,
hear our prayer tonight,
we are all thy children here this is what we pray,
keep us when the dark is near and trough every day."

Or:

"Lord keep us safe this night secure from all our fears,
 may Angels guard us while we sleep,
 till morning light appears.
 (FEAR NAUGHT). "

Another:

"Four corners to my bed
 four Angel round my head
 one to watch and two to pray
 and one to keep all fears away."

That one would help us to do mental arithmetic. That was it, no kiss goodnight, no tucking in, not another sound. Not even the sound of crying. The long windows were high you could not see out of them, but you could hear. The sound of the trains going by must have made many girls at the school feel homesick. To this day the sound of wood pigeons cooing reminds of my bed in that dormitory.

In the morning we stripped our bed, and turned the mattress, every day. Went to wash then made the bed neatly by yourself doing the corners, the first thing we were taught, all in silence.

The uniform in Summer for the little ones was red and white check dress, brown sandals, no socks, navy blue blazer, school badge in red, RVPS. A very smart Panama hat, with the red and navy band and the badge. As I grew older how I loved to show off my uniform in Sheerness.

We went to Chapel on Sundays in our own grounds. Afterwards we went for a walk in a crocodile, two elders would come along with us besides the mistress. Wandsworth prison was further along the road. We wore our Panamas on Sundays we little ones were not allowed to handle them. It was taken from your locker. The mistress put the hat on your fist, she went along the line then, putting the Panama on your head. The same procedure the other way round on the return from chapel, putting it in your locker again. Indoors we wore black shoes with a strap buttoned over. Outside in winter, shoes

were black lace up, brown on Sundays. We always wore a green pinny which covered you front and back, tied at the side. Taken off only when going to chapel, visiting day or leaving school premises. We did not have our names on our clothes - we all had a number no more than three figures, my number 179. Shoes were handed down, as of course all clothes were, the numbers were punctured on the shoes on the side. In winter we wore navy blue knickers and white linings with a pocket to keep your hanky in, warm vest, liberty bodice with rubber buttons on, don't know why but we used to chew them. A blue and white stripe blouse, navy blue serge tunic, and red and blue stripe tie, the pattern on the tie according to which house you were in. An outdoor coat called a Monkey jacket, a round hat known as a pudding basin. For best a smart navy overcoat and velour hat, with the same band as round the Panama.

Our playroom was big with high windows; on the sills sat some of the toys. I had an Austrian doll up there it was never played with. Visiting day was once a month. I cannot imagine this could be a regular thing for any girl though, we came from all over the country. In the thirties travel would have been a luxury. I can remember my mother and grandmother coming to see me. You would be playing in the playroom on a Saturday and a big girl known as an Elder, would come in (no pinny on) and whisper your name to miss Bury, you took off your pinny and went down to the big hall with the girl. What a delight it must have been to see ones family. This is the only time I saw my sister to speak to. What a change they saw in me. Not the screaming child that went there, it would have been a very unnatural meeting. I was now a little robot doing everything to command. I dare not even cry while saying goodbye. I was moulded into a PAT girl. On returning upstairs to the playroom, I must not mix with anybody till my hair had been combed. Yes for nits. A special double sided comb was dipped into some watery mauve liquid, my hair combed in strokes and wiped on tissue paper. And the so and so's looked for. The same procedure when returning from holiday.

In June 1938, when I was seven years old, I was sent to The Downs Hospital in Sutton, Surrey. I did not know till I was

sixteen that it was because I had Tuberculosis. Children were left ignorant in those days. I was there for nine months, and remember everything as if it was yesterday. It was a children's hospital, we were known as Flat Cases, you lay flat on your back all day without a pillow, for weeks. The boy in the bed next to me was named Derek Coffin. A name for the future! We sat down, as I remember, on the grass with a sun ray lamp shining on our bare backs. Had a deaf and dumb child in my ward - I used to learn the deaf and dumb language. On days when you were feeling better you dressed. I chose a brown and white dress to wear from the hospital clothes. I was conscious even then of my red hair. Lessons were held in the hospital. I had two operations on my ear, one a mastoid. When you had an operation, a pack of cotton wool or something was put over your nose with Ether on it. You always knew when an operation was taking place you could smell the Ether down the corridors. A Doctor told me when I was older the mastoid operation was given to me to stop me getting TB Meningitis. I had my eight birthday in November, Christmas followed. On the top of the tree was a pretty small doll dressed in pink, how I wished it was for me, and it was. One day I wrote a cross letter to my mother, I wanted her to come and see me, and she did come. Things were so very different in those days where hospital visiting was concerned. I returned to Wandsworth school in February 1939. I was looked after very well. I had to have Bemax spread over my porridge and bread, a kind of pick you up, but it spoilt the taste of everything, poor thing. I also had to have fish liver oil ugh, every teatime one of the elders came into the dining room with a boiled egg for me, they would draw a face on it. I was not allowed to swim in the new swimming pool outside in the school grounds. Sometimes I was taken to a hospital in London - I know we used to go over Blackfriars Bridge. Miss Osborne took me, walking down the school drive she always asked me the name of the flowers, I never remembered (they were crocuses). My ear still discharged, I had some kind of warming treatment in the ear, I don't remember that it hurt, I do remember making a bit of a fuss - guess I was frightened.

The grounds in Wandsworth were large in the afternoon when the weather was hot we little ones had our rest in the

meadows. Morehens lay their eggs in the long grass there. I made a very long daisy chain, so the girls joined their chains to mine and I have a photo taken of this when I was eight. A drive of pink and white Chestnut trees led down to the railway line where we waved flags to the Royal family whenever they were going pass in the Royal train. We would listen to the Boat Race on the radio choosing who you wanted to win, Oxford or Cambridge. Miss Bury made dark blue or light blue ribbons to wear on our tunics. Often on Saturdays we had an enamel mug full of ESN (Senna) it was awful with nasty consequences. The Elders would go to see the Royal Tournament. My brother Raymond was in the Tournament with the boys from the Duke of York School in their khaki uniforms he would have been fourteen. Strange for Betty she saw him for the first time for four or five years. This was to be my life at school in Wandsworth, London SW18. As you will read this was all to change.

In August 1939, Betty and I went home to nanny and grandad's home for our summer holiday.



Mother was there too - she was lovely, I loved her so much, it must have been very sad for her, having all three of her children at boarding

school. Betty was 15 years and so very pretty, pity this was the only time we could be together when on holiday - I was 8 years old. Raymond did not come home, poor lad. It was a wonderful summer holiday, not so many weeks in those days. Mother gave me a beautiful china doll I was thrilled with it. There used to be long summer days then. Betty took me out to the permanent fairground, I was happy on the boat swings with my new doll, I always liked the big stripe coloured beach balls you blew up. How excited I was to buy one, took it home blew it up. BANG it went - it had touched the roses in the garden. Oh dear, still I was a Pat girl, I must take it on the chin. Grandad would be busy in the garden wearing his big straw hat. There was a garden at the side, at the back a lawn, arches with roses round them, small apple trees, vegetables, all salad - I can see the prize Density lettuce tied round the middle with straw to make them hard up. Perhaps this is why I enjoy gardening myself today. There was a canvas coverway on the lawn where nanny would put afternoon tea on the foldup table. The sea front and beach was across the road. Sometimes we would be on the beach and nanny would come up the steps on the beach with a picnic, teapot and all - how sweet and kind she always was. We would all walk along the cliff top to Minster, taking a picnic, very pretty. At the White House, which was a tea place, you could get delicious ice cream. When I was older I would walk there with a china basin nanny gave me, have it filled with ice cream and hurry back before it ALL melted, no fridges in your homes in those days.

It was near the end of the lovely family holiday at home. A letter came from the school. We were not to return to Wandsworth, A war was imminent we were to be evacuated to Wales. My mother, nanny, Betty and I went by train to Victoria Station, a taxi across London to Paddington station. There we met a few girls perhaps even less than 25 from the Pat school. Of all ages. Don't know why Betty and I were chosen, perhaps it was because if there was a war, where we lived in the Thames estuary would be a dangerous place to live, near London and the naval base at Catham, up river to London docks too.



Arriving in Saundersfoot in Pembrokeshire, South Wales. We made ourselves as at home as well as we could, staying in a girl Guide hut. Wooden orange boxes turned up, so you had the ready made shelf in the middle for brush and comb, hooks on the side to hang flannel and towel. Slept on paliasses, on the floor, still not with my sister - she slept in another section of the hut. No doubt I was homesick and cried, but I would not have let anyone hear me. I'm a Pat girl. In the morning you could see all the beauty round you. We were a short way back from the coast line, where steps cut into the edge of the cliff were known as Jacob's ladder. You looked down to the beach and the small harbour. If you looked across you could see Hean castle in the distance, which would be our home if war was declared. Every morning seemed to be a sunny day, we sat on the grass to have breakfast. Even the Lady Superintendent, Mrs Higgins, and Miss Knowling who was her...understudy, shall we call her? Two wonderful people.

Those first few days with the original batch of girls were often laughed about in the years to come. Madam, as the Lady Superintendent was called, was a small, very neat lady, spoke very softly. It was Miss Knowling who had all the say, I am sure we all cared for her in some way. She would get upset if one of

her girls did not come up to her ideals, but there was never any affection shown to us.

We had been at the Guide hut for nine days. On that day **Sunday September 3rd 1939**. The dreaded announcement "We are at war with Germany". Yet again my life was to change. Fear Nought!, It was raining as it can only in Wales. Madam had a small, soft top, maroon car. She took us in batches to Hean castle, our new home two miles away.



This was the home of Lord and Lady Merthyr and their three sons, all under five years old; Trevor, John and Peter - we had to refer to them as master. Lord Merthyr was a big man, very smart in his army uniform. He met us at the large side door. Just inside to the right was the billiard room and this was to be our dormitory. That first night of the war there we were a handful of small girls sleeping on paliasses on the floor of a castle. Betty was in another room. Later, when more girls

arrived back at school, the youngest ten or twelve girls slept in there all through the war. There were four paliaasses head to toe on the billiard table, underneath were kept all our toys - out of sight, nice and tidy. The four smallest girls slept each night on the table until the war ended. When the beds had arrived from London, they were put head to toe around the room. Miss Bury had the alcove in the corner of the room two steps up windows in it, a curtain drawn across it was made very cosy. That too was hers for six years of the war. My bed was in front of the beautiful marble fireplace, large and white. Up on the wall was the smart glass cupboard with the billiard balls in, this would never be touched except to dust.

I can now tell you how lucky we were to be living in the castle. The castle was set in beautiful grounds, a dream setting. The casselated walls looked over Saundersfoot Bay. With the green slopes of Swallow Tree and Monkstone in the distance (where the Guide hut was), no houses to be seen. It was built in 1876. The pink stone in the building was brought to Saundersfoot, as ballast in the coal ships from Liverpool. As far back as the fifteenth century, there had been buildings on the land. That is why it was named Hean Castle. Meaning Hen the Welsh word for Old.

When more girls came back I was one of the older girls of Nightingale house. I was moved to upstairs in the Castle to the night nursery, so called as this had been Trevor, John and Peter's bedroom. Safety bars were across the window. About five of us slept here. Others of the little ones slept in the next room which had been the boys playroom. Madam's room was opposite my room, The Elders, as there were no seniors or juniors living at the Castle, slept in the large Oak room overlooking the front of the castle.

The Merthyr's lived in another part of the Castle which was quite private for them -they had their own lovely wide staircase. When we passed near their department we could sniff Mamsel's perfumes, the boys Governess, her bathroom was nearby.

My very grand address was;

Miss Sylvia Taylor
 R V P School
 c/o Lord and Lady Merthyr
 Hean Castle
 Saundersfoot
 Pembrokeshire
 South Wales

People giving up their large homes went on all over the country. In the Village at the top of the hill was St. Brides Hotel. Which was home for the Royal Marines. Down the very steep hill from the Castle (how I Hated that hill). There were the golden sands of Saundersfoot, rocks to climb and rock pools to play with small crabs. If you pulled the limpets off the rock pressed their middle their eyes would pop up. How unkind we were. Back up the hill I would put my hands on my knees and found it easier to walk up like that. The first weeks had passed and I was ill with my chest, I was then still sleeping on a paliasses in the billiard room. I went to sickbay which was at the top of the back stairs, and along a short passage. Sister Bliss was the only nursing staff, her room was there too, I had known her as long as I had been at the school. She wore a big flowing white nursing hat. At that time also Betty and Miss Parker, one of the mistresses, caught German measles. They were sent to the tower of the Castle in quarantine. When you come to think of it not many people can say they have been in a tower in quarantine.

We had no desks, school equipment or teachers yet from London. Miss Varndell taught the little ones, about eight of us, in the mornings in the Ballroom of the Castle, tables and spelling, I was good at tables, but what a job to learn to spell "vegetable". Miss Varndell was tall, with a hair style I have never seen since, her hair plaited then rolled round her ears like earphones. In this year as I write, 2001, at the age of ninety two she still plays the Organ for the Church service.

Betty did not have lessons. The Elders had to work. She was taught how to wait at table and Mr Moss the Butler for the Merthyr family showed her. Betty waited at table for the

family. Lady Merick, a very gracious Lady, the children's Grandmother would be there also.

We went to St. Isells Church, a short walk from the Castle, The Merthyr Family had the front middle pews and Lord Merthyr read the Lesson. We had not attended church outside before our Chapel in London had been in our own grounds. I do not know how I knew, but my sister had her eye on a boy in the choir Known as Curly Kale. Seeing we did not mix outside the Castle wall, I expect the Elders used to like to look at the choir boys, that is all it would have been, a look. When it was warm enough we little ones went to Church in bright red jumpers over our navy blue tunics, navy blue velour hat with the red and blue school band and badge brown socks and shoes. We must have looked very angelic, walking in crocodile. They said we looked like Robins.

In October Betty was sixteen, this meant she had to leave school at Christmas. She would be given a case with sufficient clothes in to go into domestic service. She was a trained Parlour Maid. She was also given a Bible from the school committee; on the first page would be written her name and when she entered and left the school, and signed by the top man in the committee. No I would not be seeing her to kiss goodbye. This seems very sad, But it was our life then and we probably never gave it a thought.

Really we were very lucky people living in a Castle, safe away from the bombs. Miss Bury would take us down to the small harbour in the village. It was exciting to see the Monks Putting pigs into their small boat to take over to Caldy Island near Tenby not far away. Only monks lived there. We would run up and down the sand dunes, too cold that time of the year to go near the sea.

Our first Christmas at the Castle 1939. A tall tree was in the hall at the foot of the Merthyr's stairs. It would have been a tree from their own plantation. Lord Merthyr had many Christmas trees. Mr Prout who looked after them would show them to us growing in long straight rows as very tiny trees, two or three inches high. As I was saying it was Christmas and

Lady Merthyr gave us all a gift from the tree. I had a fishing game, you hooked the fish from the cardboard pond each fish had a number on whoever had the highest number was the winner. Oh well I expect it amused me. I had a skipping rope from the Committee.

More of the Nightingale girls had come to the Castle, I do not think there were many more than twenty little ones at any time in Wales. We went for lovely walks along the country lanes, Picking Primroses, Violets and in the winter, Snowdrops. Small lizards ran along the banks. Walking out from the back way of the Castle, and walking down yet another hill you came to tiny Amroth beach.

I have jumped the gun a bit here. I will go back to that First month at the Castle September and the **Mackerel** Season the Fishermen were nearby in Tenby. We would have Mackerel for dinner, I just did not like it. I was left in the dining room when all the others had left. We were not allowed to leave anything on our plates. The Elder clearing the dining room was Betty's friend Diana Marsh. The little girls were not allowed salt, but Diana would let me have some. I do not remember that she took the Mackerel away though. Shame on her. One night when sleeping in the Night Nursery, I was very sick. My body knew it did not want Mackerel. To this day I do not like seeing big fish swimming round.

Also on that first Christmas day at the Castle, After lunch we would run down the Long Walk. I don't expect this was very easy for me, not being as strong as the others because of my weak chest, but we were all treated the same. It was very pretty - fields either side with cows - the Long Walk led down to the cliff. When we returned, we listened to the Kings speech.

I was a Brownie, on Thinking Day in February, all the brownies, and Lady Merthyr dressed in the Guide uniform as commissioner of the Guides, and cockade on her hat. (She was a very attractive Lady). We were out on the terrace In front of the Castle. The idea was to release a Pigeon, I can not remember where it was supposed to fly to I hope the Pigeon

did. There was a feather left in the cage and she gave it to me. Silly thing to remember. No doubt it made me happy.

I was now nine years old time for me to go to St. Florence, to a large white mansion. Major Barclay's home. Miss Stirling was the house mistress, a white haired Scots woman, she was a character. Kept us all disciplined. With the help of miss Honour and one other mistress. There were about twenty five of us, age nine to eleven. We had porridge every morning, Miss Stirling put butter on hers, a Scots custom. Food was always very good. All the delicious. Puddings and pies and roast dinners. The vegetables came from the land around us. My favourite pudding was custard, the only time I would have second helping was if it was a mince dinner or custard on the pudding. I never had a big appetite.

Once when passing the bread and butter round the table I didn't take the top piece, because it was a crust I knew the girl next to me would enjoy it more than me. Miss Honour sitting at the top of the table, gave me a mark. When Miss Knowling read out the marks and gave out the pocket money, I had lost mine, one penny!, for being discontented. She was very disappointed in me and wrote to my sister Betty who was now in the W.A.A.F. to tell her all about me being discontented. How misjudged I was.

Elmgrove was the name of the house, Major Barclay was a rough looking man with a loud deep voice. You would hear him bellowing if his bees were swarming. They may be swarming round the Walnut Tree. He would wear a large hat with a big net over his head and enormous gloves to catch the Bees. In front of Elmgrove was a Mulberry tree on the lawn, this was our play area. Noisy Turkeys roamed all over. You can imagine the mess in summer when Mulberries were dropping down. We were not allowed to eat them, But they were very tasty ! The Barclays had an enormous black horse called FOXTROT, The daughter gave me a ride on it down the drive. Why me? I bet I was scared stiff. There were no other buildings nearby.

St Florence was a very small village. A Church, Goughs the

sweet shop and a few houses. I don't remember much else. It was in between Tenby and Saundersfoot.

There were about twenty five girls at Elmgrove aged nine to eleven years. We had school on the premises. One teacher came in to teach us everything. We were taught just the three R's. I can remember the reading books, but only the titles of them. "Tale of Two Cities". "Silas Marna", "Mill on the Floss". A Temperance lady came to the class room to tell us the evil ways of drink. She told us to eat knobs of sugar for strength. All very strange but then we were in Wales and under their education system. The desks would be cleared away, then the room was our play room. The floor was bare floor boards, when they looked too dirty four girls, usually the eleven year olds, would in four lines scrub the floor, in your knickers and vest, I remember doing it. You had to be careful not to leave dirty lines in between each patch. I think we enjoyed doing it.

We attended the village Church every Sunday morning and every Sunday Evening too in the summer. Every time in the Evening we sang;

"Aren't thou weary
Aren't thou languid
Aren't thou sore distressed,
Come thou weary
Come thou languid
Come and rest."

(poor little girls!). Ever Saturday we went for a five mile walk, very pretty country side. Places like Waterwinch. Summer time we took a picnic and went swimming there - it was a very small cove. In 1938 at the time of the war crisis, some of the girls had been sent to the big house there Betty was one. I was in Hospital. Manorbier, was nearby I still have an illustrated New Testament. I received for an essay on the Bible, presented by the Vicar of Manorbier J Garfield Davis. Killgetty, another walk where true old fashioned Gypsies would be, with their wagons. Tenby we walked to at Christmas time. We would be given a few extra pennies. To buy little things, we liked to buy Nivea Cream in a tin, it smelt lovely, a

bottle of California scent or Erasmic soap. Well it's what little girls like. Then to the religious shop to buy book marks. I still have mine. For some reason we thought if we sang Annie Lowrie, we would not have to go for a walk, perhaps it worked sometimes. Perhaps for the best, Miss Stirling, for sure would have us learning a passage from the Bible. We all knew the books of the Bible in order as soon as we went to Elmgrove. No fumbling about in Church. At blackberry time we went picking them in Wedlock Farm. They were big sweet and juicy and plenty of them all-round the hedges. All us girls, nine to eleven years old, had a jam jar to keep filling then put into the wicker bread basket. We were not allowed to eat any, but I expect we all had black tongues by the end of the afternoon. We would only have one Mistress with us when we went on our walks. With a handle space either side of the basket two girls took it in turn to carry the full basket home. We knew it would be Summer pudding Sunday lunch time, and custard. In the Autumn we gathered the red rose hips from the wild rose bushes to send away for rose hip juice to be made. In winter we gathered sack fulls of acorns for the farmers to feed the pigs. Every penny we made went to the spitfire fund. Our little way of helping the war effort.

One summers day we were playing outside in front of Elmgrove. Two German planes came flying over so low, we could see the Swastikas on them. No warning had been sounded. They were on their way to Pembroke Dock to bomb the oil tanks. We saw the thick black smoke in the distance.

One Saturday I stayed in to do my Brownie cooking badge. I had never been in the kitchen or cooked anything before, but I passed making my rice pudding. Miss Knowling came over to bring a new girl to the school. Denise King, more than a year younger than me. As we did everything in age line we were not always in the same places together. As teenagers we were friends. We remained friends till her untimely death in her forties. Never seeing her grandchildren even twins.

When I was eleven and five months I became a woman. I had no idea what was happening to me, we were not told anything, I manage to keep it to myself for a few days. My mother was

coming to see me, my first visit since being in Wales. I hoped It would not stop her coming. The mistress gave me to understand it was all hush, hush. My mother did not come to see me that time her leave was cancelled she was in the Wrens. She had her appendix out instead.

Soon after, Mother and Betty had leave from the Wrens and Waafs and came to Elmgrove to visit me. I was proud of them in their smart uniforms. Miss Stirling had found them a place to stay in the village. Not their cup of tea. The old welsh man sat by a large kitchen range smoking his dirty pipe, with a big cat which neither my mother or sister like. They moved out and went to Tenby to stay. I remember feeling very embarrassed. They came for only a few days. It was Spring. I had not seen my mother for three and a half years. Because it was Easter Sunday I was not allowed out with her in the afternoon. I had to stay in and learn the Bible, Miss Sterling was the only Mistress who made us study religion.

We had double summer time in bed no talking by seven thirty. If Miss Honour crept upstairs and heard us whispering we had to get up and sand downstairs in one of the rooms for ages. I always seemed to get the dining room. It all seems so silly and unkind now. none of us misbehaved why couldn't she let us go on whispering?

At night our overcoats and gas masks in the cardboard box hung at the head of our beds. If the air raid siren sounded we, half asleep, put on our coats and slippers and carrying gas masks, we, in an orderly fashion, even in the middle of the night, went to the back stairs, and sat two on each stair. Miss Stirling sitting on a chair facing up would read to us. She would read the name of the chapter; Blackberries and Mushrooms. Then the all clear sounded and we went back to bed. This happened a few times, we never did get further than the chapter. The Germans were not interested in our part of the globe. They wanted, Pembroke Dock, and we had an American base nearby. Though we did have two windows broken from a bomb blast that fell in a field not far away, so we went to see the crater it had made. Nobody hurt.

St. Florence was a very pretty village and we would all go out picking wild flowers. Snowdrops, Primroses, Violets were growing everywhere. They would be made into posies and sold in Tenby market. All money went to the Spitfire fund.

To receive my message badge for Brownies, I was to take a message in my head. To ask Mr Twigg for so many pounds of Rhubarb for Sunday lunch. I had never been out of the school drive, then into the Village on my own ever. Then to knock on somebody's door. I kept repeating the message over and over again. Never occurred to me to cheat and write it down.

A committee member wrote a poem called A Child Evacuee. We all had to learn it, this was an out of day school thing. The poem was judged to see who recited it best. I enjoyed doing anything like this and fancied my chances. The prize went to the quietly spoken girl, as it was meant as a Prayer.

We knitted for the fighting services. I did like knitting. We used very thick oily wool to knit seaboot stockings which went to the top of the leg.

When we acted the play Christmas Carol I was Tiny Tim. Not much chance to act there, all he says is "God bless us everyone".

It was while I was at Elmgrove, eleven years old. That I received a letter my first from my brother Raymond, with a photo enclosed of him in Naval uniform. He was seventeen years, had left the Duke of York school, and volunteered in the Royal Navy. His home base was Chatham Kent. I had an uncle by marriage, who was Chatham barrack Master, Raymond must have been absolutely lost when he left the boarding school after all those years, and never coming home. What was left for him to do but follow the family tradition and join the navy. He went away to Petermaritsburgh in South Africa on HMS Ajax.

I was now eleven half, time for me to move about five mile away to Cwmwenol (which means Vale of the Swallows). A smaller house than Elmgrove, very pretty. The home of Major

Allen, an artist. His pictures hung round the house. You came up the drive in Swallow Tree Woods and when you walked in the front door you were upstairs. The room on the left was for the Elders who helped with the work. Two other rooms for my age, eleven to fourteen years. Fourteen was the age you left day school. The room in the front over looked the terrace where we played, and Major Allen's private walkway down to the small private beach and rocks. Which were all for our use now. Lucky girls.

When we walked down this path to the beach he would be there with his easel painting a very large picture, with animals of all kinds lying down together and it was called "Harmony". I wonder where it hangs now.

There were no more than twenty of us. Up the wall grew a creeping plant. Blackbirds built their nests right under the bedroom window. To the side of the house was a Dutch Garden, pretty in spring with Tulips.

Miss Groves was the house mistress, tall slim white hair, we called her Grannie Groves - not to her face. She had a cat which kept to her room down stairs, she sang strange words to it, which sounded like. "A cosy duck a cosy beaker". The only time she seemed to be happy really.

We were near to Mr Sharlands estate now, where we first came to three years ago, when camping at the Guide hut back in Saundersfoot. Yes the war was still going. In the Summer we went pea picking on his land, sack fulls of them. We enjoyed this because it was in the evening, and we were not going to bed at seven thirty. We were not allowed to eat them, but. We put them in our knicker pocket and yes up the leg too, which had elastic round them. They were lovely and sweet - pods as well, when we ate them down the bed that evening (the sun would still be shining). The money for picking went to the Spitfire Fund, everything to help the war effort.

School was not on the premises, we walked to and fro. To St. Issels Church, back near the Castle. We used the building in the Church grounds in amongst the grave stones, we had no

playground we wondered round the graves, reading the verses, very odd some of them, and very old graves. Lord Mertyry's plantations were there, we picked the Primrose that grew amongst them. We also picked the very sweet wild strawberries that grew on the graves. The building was two floors we used the top floor, on level ground with the Church. We looked down on the graves, we watched a Buzzard Hawk flying in the graveyard settling on the tombstones for ages, then sadly one day it was dead. We measured the span of the wings, forty eight inches. Green Wood Peckers were also a regular sight tap tap tap on the trees. The fields full of Peewits, calling out Peewitt, Peewit. they have a long cone like feather on the head. A terrible thing; it took a war to give us children a country life away from London.

Miss Parker a very nice young mistress, although I don't think we appreciated her at the time. She came from Margate in Kent. Her father was Captain of Margate Life Boat. Her brother was killed at sea in the war he was a Merchant Seaman. Miss Parker Would walk with us in crocodile, to school. She rode her bike back again to us for our lunch hour. She would bring the Daily Telegraph read us any important news. Then read the names of the new born babies born, that had been advertised. A bit of fun from the outside world. Two girls took it in turns to carry bags to school with our sandwiches in. Although all the meals were excellent I did not enjoy the sandwiches: Pilchard, or cream cheese which was made in our own kitchen from all the sour milk we had. Sometimes they were wet from the rain.

Miss Jones who lived in the village came to teach us every day. All taught the same thing together eleven to fourteen years old. I was making a night dress for myself not to wear while at school though. I thought it was exciting to be sowing, by hand, something that was not uniform, it was pale green trimmed in lilac. I also, in crochet, made four motifs, joined them together, then sent it to my Grandmother. It is now in my own home.

At play time we collected acorns put them on the end of the nib on the pen you wrote with, (which was the kind you dipped

into the ink) then put the acorn into the open fire in the class room. Roasted acorns - very tasty. *You* should try it.

On Sunday afternoons we wrote letters home we gave them in and they would be read before being sent off. I would receive post most days from mother or Betty. She sent mostly cards of the Nipper series or Margarant Tarrant cards. If I had them now they would be worth something, they were all read before you had them. Some girls heard from home once in a blue moon.

In our spare time we had to do our own mending, a lot of darning woollen socks. When that was finished you must mend the sheets and pillow slips, darning must be done so that it was perfect. Some pillow slips seemed to be just darns. Surely there was no need for this. There had been many more girls in London than there were in Wales. Every where the slogan was "Don't be a SQUANDER BUG".

I should tell you how Nanny sent me a jar of marmite. She sent it in an empty cocoa tin. I would enjoy this on my bread at tea time. One day was white bread the next brown, Sundays and Wednesday you had a bun or nibly or vinegar cake which was delicious and sticky. Betty sent me her sweet ration. Miss Groves would look after it, it was very embarrassing having to always ask for them.

We went to the same Church as the Hean Castle girls. I was back where I was when I was eight, but sitting behind the little ones. The Royal Marines staying near us in St brides Hotel, Marched behind us to Church and sat behind us senior girls in Church. The Merthyr family would still be there. Not Lord Merthyr - Sadly he was taken prisoner of war at Singapore at the start of the war. Dr. Perrit in the village, our school doctor, lost his son in the war. The sons wife had a new baby, and Miss Knowling asked me to knit a garment for the baby. There were many sad stories in the war.

We did not have visitors as a rule or go home during the war years. My mother came to see me on her own this time, in her Wrens uniform. I was so embarrassed because she wore her

slakes which was uniform. You had not seen women in trousers before. I felt the Lady Superintendent and staff were saying " TUT TUT. I went out for a walk with my mother. There was a little place which had written outside Ginger Beer sold here. We both had a glass. I felt very guilty I was sure I should not have had it. I dare not tell anyone back at school. What a strict childhood I had.

The summers always seemed to be lovely, but still we had to carry gas masks with us. Holidays from lessons, no home work for us when you were elementary school children. We would go to the sandy beach in Saundersfoot and play rounders. The Americans were there sometimes. I wonder if that is where they got their baseball game from watching us play rounders. May be? With a large net we would drag it along the edge of the sea to catch shrimps. Or collect winkles for tea which I did not like eating. When it was going to thunder the sea would turn almost black, and the porpoises could be seen in the sea. Another time we would go to our beach by Cwmwenol, just walk down the path. Many Sloe bushes there they were very sour, you use them to make Gin.

At Christmas the girls from Cwmwenol, after we had been to Church, had our dinner, opened our presents and listened to the Kings speech. We walked up to the Castle for a party tea and some kind of trying to dance. This would have been real fun as we were never up late. Then to walk back in a Crocodile, as we walked on the road by the sea. I saw a sight I have never seen since the phosphorous on the sea edge, sparkling like jewels.

The winters were always very cold long icicles hung everywhere we broke them off and sucked them. When we were at School one day in the Church grounds, when I was thirteen it was February 1944. Miss Parker came as usual with the Telegraph, but on this day it was not usual. She read to us That HMS Penelope had been sunk by the Germans. This was my brother Raymond's ship. The ship was sunk off the Anzio Beach Head. With the loss of over four hundred



lives. There were so many men lost because of so much oil in the sea from the ship. Raymond had been changed from the ship Ajax to the Penelope, Nicknamed the Pepperpot, because of all the holes from a previous battle she had in Her...

I received a Special Christmas airmail letter from my brother it was 1943, his nineteenth birthday. We had not seen each other since he was nine and I was three. He was away at sea in the war. A happy letter about when he came home, and what he would say to me, after all the years. It was a big brother letter writing to his little sister. Saying he would be sending me a necklace soon. I still have the letter, a treasured keepsake.

Penelope was said to be the most bombed and torpedoed ship in World War Two. A U-boat had sunk brave penelope with three torpedoes.

Betty wrote to Miss knowing, who came to Cwmwenol to let me know Raymond was missing presumed killed. Those dreaded words words "Missing presumed killed ". How many thousands of families heard them during the war.

That summer I went home travelling with an older girl and her cousin, we all lived in Kent. The manoeuvres for D Day had begun, and the troops had put up a smoke screen that morning. You cannot see what is going on as it was all hush hush! I thought it was going to stop us getting to the station. It was a long slow journey from South Wales to Paddington, then we had to catch another train from Victoria. My Grandfather met me at Gillingham. When we arrived at Sheerness I had to show my identity card, I was a stranger there, and it was a banned area.

I had not been home for five years it was very strange, almost a homesick feeling. I had never been to school in Sheerness and knew nobody. I could see my mother as she was in Wrens Quarters HMS Wildfire in Sheerness. I could go there if she was not at her parents home. Mother was a very smart good looking woman in her Chief Petty Officers uniform. She had been ready with her tropical white uniform to go to South Africa in the Wrens. This was cancelled with the sad news of Raymond. This must have been so sad for her to live with every day.



I returned to school Nanny's cooking had made me put weight on, something I could not do. I did not have an appetite like the other girls. I tried to pass some of my food on to another girl - this was not easy with the mistress sitting at the head of the table. I had to lose the food somehow, I would have had to sit there till it had all been eaten. I had to get it under the table and into my knicker pocket, it was quite big. What I did with it then I do not remember. Then came my chance it came that I was to take the Ducks food to the only house in the Swallow Tree Woods. Miss Gwynn Vaughn and her sister lived there. Who as luck would have it kept ducks I was to take the school vegetable peelings to them each day (I had somewhere to empty my pocket) GOOD!. Walking through the woods I did enjoy picking the Billberries and eating them though.

I was in two plays at Cwmwenol in one I was a Princess and wore a high conical hat. The other was called "Why the Chimes Rang", At a certain moment in the playing of the Hallelujah Chorus. I had to get up off my knees and say. "The Chimes, God's Chimes" I was afraid I was going to jump up at

the wrong time. For days during this time I had a terrible pain in where the salt seller is on my shoulder. I was afraid to say anything.

When there was an air raid, we would put on our overcoats and taking our gas mask, go downstairs to the kitchen which was also our dining room. We always had a mug of hot cocoa, very much enjoyed the only time we had cocoa. Our washing went to one of the villagers to do in her home. I remember going there, a small house, you couldn't breath in there what with the steam and the washing drying, no washing machines in those days. Two of you would carry the large bread basket, and on the way to school drop out of the crocodile to take it to Mr Hunt the baker, this was on his own house premises. I will have to admit to helping myself to a tiny piece of the cooking chocolate in the bakery, it was too hard to get a big piece. He took any books for salvage for the war effort, if we gave him some he might give you a penny. We did not catch up with the other girls, when we passed the bakers in the village we bought a penny bun. There would have been trouble if we had been found out, anything like that was out of bounds. We older girls of course had started to look at the Royal Marines, as we passed the hotel which was their Barracks, which we did every time we went out. That is all it was, a look! We had one or two names for them, one who shouted, blue eyes was the good looking officer with the bright eyes. We never met to speak to the opposite sex. I think I can honestly say I did not speak to a boy all the years I was at the Pat school.

It was getting lively in Saundersfoot the services were preparing for the second front. D DAY! The british Tommies were camping in our wood which was only small. They were on army rations, when we went to school in the morning they had mirrors hanging on trees shaving. The Americans were very noisy they marched through the village, shouting what sounded like. "Hut two three four, Hut two three four". Their tanks broke up the roads a good thing they came to help us in the war. After we had gone to bed on those long light evenings, when the Amphibious tanks were in the sea we were allowed to get on our dressings gowns and go out on the terrace to watch them. They were frightening to see enormous

machines coming out of the sea and going on land. Saundersfoot beach was just the beach for manoeuvres. We were a banned area - our letters were read before receiving them. No one knew when D DAY was to be. There were sayings like "Walls have ears". "Careless talk costs lives". We were seeing more of the Preparations in our village than most people. I have often wondered how many of those brave men returned home.

King George Sixth gave his speech each Christmas, one year we had to learn it. It went like this. I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year. Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown. He replied. "Go out into the darkness put your hand into the hand of God. It will be better for you than light, and safer than a known way".

On June 6 1945 at lessons in the Churchyard in the morning. We were told this is D DAY ! D for DELIVERANCE !. Surely this would end the war soon All that took place is told in the History books of today. The war in Europe had ENDED. There were Many sad terrible stories to be told. The lucky ones could go HOME.

I was fourteen; you left day school then - the age went up to fifteen the next year for leaving education. That meant I had to work in the school. I went back to the Castle to work under Miss Bury helping with the Nightingale girls. I had done the rounds; I was back where I started, when the war began. I had to do lots of horrible chores, as I was now an Elder I would get three pennies a week. It was my turn to sleep in the Castle in the Oak room in charge of about eight little ones. I went for walks with them, hoping they would not get their shoes too dirty, as I had to clean twenty six pairs of shoes every evening in the boot shed in the Castle yard, putting them back in their lockers. I would brush away looking up at a Medlar tree it is a brown fruit, I have never seen one since. No my evening had not finished, the girls had to inspect all their clothes when they went to bed, any buttons off, holes in clothes, the inevitable sock darning. When they were all in bed Miss Bury, Miss Osborne and me did the mending. The evening was then free for me. Fourteen or not I had to be in bed by eight

thirty.

The little ones had lessons in the Castle, while this went on I had to clean the rooms. I also had the Privilege? of cleaning Miss Knowling's rooms. Two four year olds only went to school in the morning. In the afternoon they slept in their beds in the Billiard room, I sat with them darning. Margaret Bins had white hair and had a north county accent, odd to us. She would soon speak the same as we all did. She was a clever girl, you could teach her something, she would remember it. The other little girl, so sweet, Pauline Cripps. They were younger than I was when I went to the Pat school.

We all wore our fathers' regiment on our coats to Church on Sundays. Yes I cleaned them on Saturdays, I knew all of them and who they belonged to. Not many Royal Navy or Air Force mostly Army, mine was the only Tank Regiment.



Now came the time we were all waiting for - we were going home. We all had a new Victory dress, different coloured checks, and - wait for it - puff sleeves, never been known,

white ankle socks too, which were new for us. The thing was, we did not know this life at home. It must have been like this for all those returning after the war, wherever they were coming from. Mother and Betty were there on leave. They would have to wait their turn to be demobbed from the forces.

The war in Japan was now over, the prisoners could return. I was one day walking up the back stairs of the castle, when I came face to face with Lord Merthyr, returned home from the cruel hands of the Japanese in their prisoner of war camp. Just a shadow of the man I had first seen greeting us at the side door of his castle, on 3rd September 1939, the day the war started, when I was eight years old.

Jim, brother to my aunt and also a Japanese prisoner, came to stay with Nanny - he was so very thin. She could look after Jim and give him good food. My Grandparents were very kind people. Their three fighting sons had come home from the war. Uncle Bert was safe when his ship was sunk. He got shrapnel through his nose. Betty went to the pictures with Jim, I went along too but I did leave them to walk along the beach alone after. Betty still remembers this.

It was a very happy, yet unhappy, time for people returning home after the war, children who had never seen their fathers. The people who never returned. The wounded in mind and body, strange for those like me who had grown up over the six years away from home. I had experienced a different world. Living in a Castle, and mansion houses, in Pembrokeshire, a beautiful part of the country. Seeing the preparations for D DAY. Yet at home things had stood still.

It was time to return to Wales. Some girls did not come back to school so that left just the little ones in Nightingale, Betty Clarke, who was just one month older than me, and myself, the only girls at the Castle. My bed was now in the day nursery which had a bathroom in the alcove and about eight beds. I still did all those jobs as before working for Nightingale. Betty Clarke went out to school to Tenby - she was still studying. As we were the only Elders we had treats as we would not have had normally. Miss Wallace resident at the Castle but not a mistress, treated us taking us in her car to Tenby to the

pictures. One film we saw was Gregory Peck in "Keys of the Kingdom". Goodness what a perfect looking man! Having been starved of male company for so many years, not ever mixing or even speaking to boys, Betty and I had somebody to dream about. AHH Gregory! we would say when seeing each other.

On her day off Miss Bury took Betty and I to Tenby to have tea at Miss Pudsy Dawson's home, her friend. She lived near the Quay one of the fishing fraternity I believe. Yes we had fish for tea but it luckily was not Mackerel. This was the first time I had ever been out to tea since being at school.

I had not been Christened. When at home last time. Mother bought me a brown dress with a white collar. On July 30 1945 Mother, Nanny in Holy Trinity Church were at my Christening. The name Jennifer was added as my middle name. The Vicar said I had answered up very well, of cause I did, I had found the Christening for adults in my Prayer book and rehearsed it to myself. I was a PAT girl.

During the winter of 1946 there was a lot of illness at the school, we were not to return to the school in Wandsworth again. Which in the war had been used as a clearing station for foreigners. We were going to a school in Hertfordshire which was not ready for us. It was thought it was best if we all went home till it was ready, so we went home early in March.

It was a long holiday spent at my Grandparents home. My mother and sister waiting for their demob from the services. My mother still at Sheerness so I could see her Betty in Melksham Wiltshire. I would go out with Nanny shopping - food was still rationed, you were rationed with one shop. Nanny went to Shrubsoles in the high street. We would visit Mrs Hedge a family friend, who always said "Lottie fetch me this or that from the shops ". She always called Nanny Lottie. It was a small house with a door that opened on to the pavement, inside was a kitchen range on the walls hung pictures of old fashioned ladies all done in silver paper. When we arrived back at Alberta which was the name of our house, the door would be ajar, Grandad would have opened it for four

thirty, the time nanny came home - she always went out in the afternoon. The kettle would be on, the table cloth on and the table laid for tea. Grandad would say to me "Always take care of the bridge that carries you across Sylvie". Lovely people! Nanny and me would do the fashions, and the crossword in the News of the World a sixpenny postal order and send it off, we never won anything, there were too many alternatives to the answers. Grandad told me stories of when he was at sea he would like me to sing the songs I knew to him. My cousin lived opposite, she was born three days before my brother was killed, so my grandparents had a new Grandchild, then lost one. Mary was two I spent a lot of time over there amusing her.

By now it was May. My Mother and Betty were demobbed. Mother was working as a housekeeper to a Mr Tommy Farr a travelling salesman in Twickenham, Middlesex. Betty and I went to stay there. Tommy took us to many places round about there, like Bushy Park With all the Deer. Virginia Water - it was beautiful with the sunset on the water between the trees. I have never forgotten it. I had never been out and about away from school meeting people. Tommy came from Rochdale and was down to earth. I remember him saying that one day they would be able to make a human baby in a bottle, and this was 1946. He never stopped talking he was very interesting to listen to and laugh with at the end of the day - it is true, my jaws were aching.

After two weeks Betty and Tommy were Married. Nanny came to Twickenham, the marriage was at Ealing Registry office. I went home with Nanny. Betty Clarke came to spend a few days with me, I thought she was so clever travelling all the way from Exeter in Devon to Sheerness on her own.

In June our new premises were ready. Betty Clarke and myself went back to school together, us and Nightingale were the first batch, the other girls would come a few days later. The new school had been the home of Lord and Lady Freemantle with acres of grounds. My dormitory with ten or twelve beds in was at the side of the house, Miss Bury had her room in between my room and Betty's room, with intervening doors. Betty's room the same as mine and we looked after the little

ones. My bed was by the fire escape.



School was now under one roof, I still had the same jobs to do with the Nightingale children, with another thing added. In the afternoon I went to Miss Honour in the needle room, and learnt to use a treadle sowing machine. Making green aprons and navy blue knickers - the ones the girls wore. They did not intend me to be idle or have any spare time to myself.

We were in the pretty village of Essendon near Hatfield, just a post office and sweet shop. We walked through the grounds to the back gate to the Church on Sundays, helping to fill the church up. We always looked very smart in our uniforms and wearing our father's regimental badge. On returning to Bedwell Park, our new address, we walked through the village to the front gate, with the board up; "R V P School". Being June when we arrived at Bedwell the drive was glorious with Rhododendrons in bloom.

Lessons were held on the premises two or three girls went to the Grammar school in Barnet which took them through Potters Bar where my mother was. She had joined the Land Army helping the wardens with cooking for the girls when they came in from working on the land. On my sixteenth birthday my mother gave the girls on the coach from school

my present to give to me, a Pearsons hair brush - they were special and I had wanted one. Mother came to the school with a large long flat birthday cake made for me at the Hostel. Amazing as food was still rationed?

With all the school under one roof we started having prefects again; Betty Clarke, Irene Halford, Denise King and myself were they. We now had nine pennies pocket money each week to spend in the sweet shop in the village. The Heads, Mistresses and girls all had meals together in the dining hall. One meal time Miss Knowling told us we had acquired two Fox Hounds, Wait for it!! They had chosen Sylvia, ME to look after them, because then I could relate to the little ones I looked after and talk to them all about the dogs. I was to go to the kitchen get their food pour cod liver oil over it, take the food to where they were shut up and go in there with them. I was terrified. I had never had anything to do with dogs. Of course I did not say so they thought I was being privileged. The Fox Hunting Meet met up at the school front door to hunt across our grounds. The older girls were there to see them off. A picture of this was in the Sunday Observer news paper. My two charges were in the pack of hounds.

I was sixteen time for me to leave school at Christmas. They had been training me to be a nurse maid, Miss Honour was making my white and blue and white uniforms. She took me to Hertford on the bus to buy my leaving clothes. This would have been a real treat if only we could see where we were going, the fog was so thick, a real pea super - as you could get in those days. We couldn't see Hertford at all. I was very disappointed in the clothes Miss Honour chose for me, you would have thought I was going to a Convent, not out into the world for the first time. Brown velour hat, brown overcoat, thick brown skirt, thick brown stockings, brown lace up shoes. I had knitted a mottled green jumper in cheap yarn, and a large brown case for my uniform to be taken home in. I had not been confirmed, which was usual before you left the school. I was given a Bible and Prayer book from the school committee. Inside the Bible it had written that I had come to the school in August 1937 and left in December 1946, signed Brigadier Braithwaite.

Time to leave the PAT school. I was leaving the people I had lived with for ten years as the mistresses were all still there and the girls were more like your sisters. Out into that big - and to me, unknown - world. FEAR NOUGHT !!!

December sixteenth, it was snowing very heavily as it did in those days, most of the girls had gone to Hatfield to catch the train. My mother came to collect me, we walked down the drive, by now covered in thick snow, to catch the little bus to Potters Bar. Then on to the double decker 134 bus to Victoria Station to catch the train to Sheerness, and HOME to my Grandparents home. You must understand every thing I did from now on was new to me.

I had always walked out in a crocodile, done everything in age line, learnt nothing about life, we never asked questions or were told of the slipfalls we might come across in life. I had never been in a shop on my own, never used a telephone or knew how to use one. Not even handle money except my pocket money, knew nothing about it except when doing sums. I had not even crossed a road on my own. Not learnt any cooking or even made a cup of tea, we never went in the school kitchen. I had a lot to learn more than most at the age of sixteen.

I was polite and courteous, knew the correct way to hold a knife and fork, how to speak nicely, I could write a good letter. I had lived in beautiful places in lovely surroundings. I could not have been better looked after, the staff were good people.

What was I like now? I was short, with a good figure, slim, with a seventeen inch waist. I was told by the school carpenter I would be married by the time I was nineteen with a smile like I had. I was shy, I had never been brought out, but for sure it was going to happen now. FEAR NOUGHT.

I have worked it out: from the age of six when I went to the school, until I left at sixteen, I was home only twenty weeks altogether. Of course the war years prevented us from going

home - there were many in the same boat, I know.

How do I remember all this, you ask? Well, I lived a routine life, long, double summer time evenings in bed early - you wrote your own diary in your head.

I have never regretted going to the Royal Victoria Patriotic School. I am proud to be able to say I went there, I had a good family, but the school was better than the alleyways of Sheerness. An important thing I did learn which will always get you through life is *common sense*.

What I hate is mans inhumanity to man.

We will leave it there shall we???

RVP School Song:

Attention ye worthy citizens
 And hold your head up high.
 For the children of the forces three
 Are now passing by.
 Inheritance of honour
 One in Sky, Trench and Sea
 Harken to the war cry of these bairns of pedigree.

Right Royal, Royal, Royal, we will muster
 And we'll fight.
 For the Vic-vic-victory
 That always follows right.
 AND The Pat-Pat-Patriotic care shall ever be
 The Honour of our country and the RVP

Child Evacuee:

Safe in thy love and tender care
 In waking, and in sleep
 Oh God from Peril Scathe and scare
 Thy little children keep.
 In camp, in cot, by farm field
 Wherever now they bide,
 Be Thou there shelter and their shield
 Their guardian and their guide.
 Let naught that flies athwart the air
 Their gaze by day affright no sirens wail, no searchlights glare.
 Their dream disturb by night.
 And when, at last these discords cease
 And Harmony shall Reign
 Bring them O Lord in Joy and Peace
 Safe, home to us again.

Poems by Sylvia Taylor - aged 13, 1944

H.M.S Penelope

To me Penelope was the finest ship
That ever sailed the sea.
England, Dear England, may her spirit lie in thee.
In many a battle she did fight not for fame but for the Right.
'Til one day, God her did call
In her last but bravest one of all.
There are others, who like me think
She did not fail when she did sink
But had a battle for England won
For on her was many an English son.
Many too have lost their lives
Through fighting on the rough and salty tides.
So may the navy for ever be
To stand as a monument to thee.
God grant that those, who killed at sea,
Be placed in the mosaic of victory.

A Soldier's Thoughts When Leaving England

O' England as I leave your shores
I think of home your vales and moors
Think of the times that before me lay
I'll fight to gain and not to slay
And if I died then while I fought,
That home I'd reach that I had sought
And as I sail I pray that this my time
Of duty I will not miss
And now dear God land we are sighting.
Bless the men who now are fighting
Hold them in the time of woe
And if they fail let not them go
But raise them up this wide
World to defend
And we will triumph in the end.

As he stood his post upon the shore
He was killed
He thought no more.